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ABSTRACT

The resettlement experiences of a Vietnamese refugee family in an East Coast metropolitan area with a large refugee influx is studied. The report is in the form of a journal written by a family member, but is actually a composite of real experiences based on information gathered from interviews with individuals knowledgeable about refugee resettlement in the area. The family includes a mother, father, three school-age children, and the father's older brother and sister-in-law. The narrative begins on the family's first day in the United States and proceeds through the first year of resettlement. It presents the father's impressions, attitudes, and concerns, and describes general and specific experiences of acculturation and adjustment. Margin notes refer to discussion points made in notes at the end of the text. An evaluation form to be used by readers of the study is also included. (MSE)

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RESETTLEMENT CASE STUDY

Impacted East Coast Metropolitan Area

March 1986

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Resettlement Case Study Survey

Position: ☐ Coordinator
☐ Supervisor
☐ Other (Please specify)_____

	Case Study #1 (Impacted Area)	Case Study #2 (Non-Impacted Area)
1. Was the resettlement information included:	☐ too much ☐ about right ☐ too little	☐ too much ☐ about right ☐ too little
2. Were the resettlement themes (issues):	☐ clear ☐ unclear	☐ clear ☐ unclear
3. Was the information included about the characters:	☐ too much ☐ about right ☐ too little	☐ too much ☐ about right ☐ too little
4. Was the style of presentation:	☐ hard to follow ☐ easy to follow	☐ hard to follow ☐ easy to follow

5. How would you use the information in the case studies?
   ☐ teacher training
   ☐ lesson planning/in-class use
   ☐ reading material for upper-level (E/E+) students
   ☐ other_____

6. If this were available in the native language, would it be useful for students?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If yes, given the extra cost of multiple language production, how would you rate its importance?
   ☐ very important
   ☐ somewhat important
   ☐ limited importance

7. Was the language usage for <u>teachers</u>:	☐ appropriate ☐ inappropriate Why? _____	☐ appropriate ☐ inappropriate Why? _____
8. Was the level of English for <u>E/E+ students</u>:	☐ too high ☐ about right ☐ too low	☐ too high ☐ about right ☐ too low

(Survey continues on back)

9. What can we do to make the case studies more useful?

10. Are there any themes that you would like to see included in the case studies?

11 What did you enjoy about reading the case studies?

Case Study #1

Case Study #2

12. Additional comments:

CASE STUDY #1

IMPACTED EAST COAST METROPOLITAN AREA

Prologue

This case study presents the experiences of the Nguyen family. The journal is a record of events in the actual resettlement process of a refugee family. In order to protect the privacy of the individuals, the names used are not their true ones; however, the incidents reported are a composite of real experiences of refugee families who resettled in a large metropolitan area on the East Coast of the United States.

This area has received a large influx of refugees. The geographic area covers a 30-mile radius, but there are large pockets of refugee populations, primarily near areas of low-income housing. In 1975, the area received thousands of refugees and has continued to attract large numbers of refugee arrivals ever since. The community as a whole has welcomed them and the special services for refugees are abundant, and, for the most part, good.

The information reported in this paper was gathered from interviews of several individuals knowledgeable about refugee resettlement in this area. These people were both Americans and refugees (Vietnamese, Lao and Khmer), both men and women; they were drawn from VOLAGS, MAAs, employment and adult education programs, public schools and health and mental health services. The information was analyzed to identify themes present in the lives of refugees and a composite was written as a chronical of early resettlement experiences of the Nguyen family.

A brief description of the characters may help you to follow them through the first year in their new country.

- **Nguyen Van Phan**, the father, was a former small business owner in Vietnam. With the encouragement of his brother, Khoa, Phan helped his family escape from Vietnam two years ago.

- **Tran Dung**, his wife, had always been a housewife in her own country.

- **Triet** is the oldest son and the child who, at age 16, has the most vivid memories of his native land.

- **Nga**, 15 years old, is the only daughter of Phan and Dung. She is happy to be in America and wants to "fit in" with American teenagers.

- **Lam** is 9 years old and the baby of the family. He remembers more about the camp than about Vietnam and is excited by everything he is experiencing in the United States.

- **Nguyen Ha Khoa** is Phan's older brother. After three aborted attempts, he and his family escaped from Vietnam nine years ago but spent four years in a refugee camp in Southeast Asia before being allowed to come to their present East Coast home.

- **Pho Thanh** is the stoic, hard-working wife of Khoa. She has no illusions about life in America and, even knowing how difficult it is, she is very happy to be here.

We invite you to read and follow their experiences as immigrants in their new country.

At certain places throughout this case study you will find the letters, D.P., in the right margin. These discussion points provide background information on important resettlement issues that may be used in class discussions. Refer to pages 22-26 for additional information related to the discussion points.

Day One

My name is Nguyen Van Phan. I am very tired as I begin writing this, but I want to record my feelings so I can remember how it was when I started my new life in the United States. My wife, Tran Dung, and my three children, Triet, Nga, and Lam, arrived with me at the airport in the city which is to be our new home. My brother and his family met us,and seeing him was one of the happiest times of my life.

My brother, Khoa, came here five years ago, but it has been nine years since I last saw him. At that time he and his wife, Thanh, had only three children. Now they have five!

We were so happy to see our family and to finally be out of the refugee camp that we even enjoyed being crowded in the car on the way to Khoa's house. It is very cold here. The roads are slick and hard to drive on because of what is called freezing rain. Even though Khao brought coats for us when he met us at the airport, we were still cold. My sister-in-law, Pho Thanh, said getting accustomed to the cold weather was hard in the beginning and she still doesn't like it.

I had a hard time seeing the scenery because there were so many cars traveling so fast. My first impression is that things are very clean and quite beautiful. There are many trees, although they are without leaves now because it is winter. The buildings are taller than I expected and there seem to be many new ones under construction.

It took us about forty-five minutes to reach Khoa's house. We will be staying with him and his family until we can move into our own home. Khoa, Thanh, and their children live in a three-bedroom house, which they rent. They have only lived there for about a year, and before that they lived in a small apartment until they could afford something better. I'm not sure how long we'll stay with them, but for now we are happy. I know they are glad to have us, but with seven people already in the house, adding five more crowds everyone.

There were so many things to talk about! We talked and talked, then talked some more. It is now very late and I'll go to bed as soon as I finish writing this.

Days Two thru Seven

I can hardly believe we're here. Some of Phan's friends have come to visit and to welcome us. Most of them are happy to be in the United States and they are full of stories about their experiences when they first arrived here. Everyone wants to give us some advice about something.

The VOLAG who brought us here met with Khoa and Thanh before we arrived and gave them a list of things we need to do. If we weren't staying with my brother, the VOLAG would have found an apartment for us, paid the security deposit and the first month's rent. Since we're with Khoa our VOLAG provided enough food for about two weeks and some warm clothes for each of us. Otherwise Khoa and Thanh are responsible for our expenses.

They tell me that everyone has to pay a security deposit when they rent a house or apartment. This is to assure the landlord that he has the money for an extra month's rent in case you cause damage or move our without giving notice. If you don't pay your rent each month they can throw you out of the apartment. I think they call it eviction. I don't know whether Khoa's landlord knows that we are staying with them or what he would do if he found out.

We all had to go to the health clinic to make sure we didn't have TB or other health problems. The clinic is free and there are people who work there who speak Vietnamese and several other languages. Most of the people were nice and they told us we can use other clinics in the area if we get sick later on. My children can't enroll in school until they have their health exam card from the clinic to present to the school.

We are lucky. None of us had any serious problems, but since we all had the BCG innoculation in Vietnam all of us

showed some T.B. symptoms. My wife, Dung, showed a very strong positive reaction so the doctor gave her pills that she must take for several months as a preventive measure. She also has bad teeth and will need to have a lot of work done at the dental clinic.

D.P.#1 Having a positive TB test doesn't mean you can't work or go to school...see p.22

Khoa took us to an office where we got our social security numbers. We had to have these before we could enroll the children in school. It's a good thing he was with us because I didn't understand anything, and Khoa told us what to do. He says many people ask for your social security number in this country and that it is an important document to have.

Triet, Nga and Lam were afraid when they went to register for school, but after they got there and found out there was a special office to assist foreign-born students they were very happy. The Vietnamese counselor asked a lot of questions and gave them a few tests before they went to their assigned schools. Triet is sixteen so they placed him in the tenth grade. Nga, who is fifteen, was placed in the ninth grade. Lam is only nine so he will go to an elementary school where he is in the fourth grade. Their cousins go to the same schools so at least they know someone there. The intake workers invited us to attend the PTA (Parent-Teacher's Association) so we could meet our children's teachers and learn more about the instructional program they will receive. Khoa tells me that it is the American way for parents to be involved with their children's schools.

D.P.#2 Many areas have special services to assist foreign-born students... see p.22

Both Khoa and Thanh go to work every day and I know it was an imposition for them to take off work so they could take us to the school, clinic, and social security office. We also went to the welfare office to apply for public assistance. Our VOLAG worker won't be happy with us, but I am worried that we won't be able to live without it. Dung thinks we would be crazy if we didn't take the "free money" that is offered. She wants to have an easy life here.

Getting public assistance wasn't quite as simple as I thought it would be. Before the welfare office would approve our application, we were required to enroll in adult English

classes and talk to a job counselor about working. Dung and I must attend school every day and cooperate with our job counselor, or the welfare worker may recommend that our public assistance money be terminated. Both Khoa and Thanh went to this school when they arrived in the U.S. and they said it was very good. This time Thanh had their daughter, Kim, go with us on the bus. She said we'll need to travel by bus anyway so we should learn now. I wonder if we'll remember which busses to take. Because we live several miles from the school, we must take two of them and it takes about an hour to get there.

There are many people attending the school; a lot of new refugees and immigrants from all over the world were also there to register. After I took the English test I was assigned to Level 3, even though I had been in Level D in the camp. Dung didn't do so well and she was assigned to Level 2. We had an interview with a job couselor who asked us questions about ourselves and talked to us about some of the things he could help us with. We talked a little about making a plan for our resettlement here. I do have a plan, but I don't want him to know. Right now I want to go to school to master my English and then I want to go to college. I didn't want to speak good English with him because I'm not ready to go to work yet, and I'm afraid that he will try to make me go if I speak too well. The counselor also asked Dung about working. Dung wonders what she can do because she has never worked before.

We were told to come back the next Monday to begin classes, so the rest of the week we just enjoyed life. We took a bus to an area where there are many Oriental stores. The shops reminded me of home and for a while I imagined I was in Vietnam again. One thing they have here that they didn't have in Vietnam are video films *in my language*! Khoa's friend has a VCR and we watched a movie at his house. Khoa's children also have many tapes and they listen to music all of the time. They like American music but Khoa and Thanh like Vietnamese music so we listened to Vietnamese tapes for many hours.

D.P.#3 Camp and U.S. ESL levels do not necessarily correspond... see p.22

D.P.#4 Even upper level students need more ESL before college See p.22

D.P.#5 Chances for entry-level work are actually good for refugees without previous work history...See p.22

Dung and I eat a lot of rice, but Khoa and Thanh's children like American food, so our children want to eat it, too. I wonder if I will ever learn to like it.

Weeks Two, Three, Four

Both Dung and I go to English classes in the morning. Classes are also offered in the afternoon and evening. In order to take care of children, a husband and wife may go to school at different times. Many of the people who go to school in the evening also work during the day.

I feel like I have forgotten all of the English that I ever learned. The teacher talks so fast and won't allow us to use anything but English in the class. She keeps telling us to talk to as many people as possible and assures us that we have enough English to survive. One thing I notice here is that the teachers often use examples about work while they are teaching. Some students feel a little annoyed because they don't want to go to work until their welfare expires. They think, "the later the better!" The teacher takes attendance every day, and if we can't go to school we are expected to call the school office to tell them why. Some refugees have already been called by their caseworkers from the public assistance office because they aren't attending classes. They also keep reminding us to be on time!

I had another interview with my job counselor who asked me again about my plan. My counselor is a Vietnamese man about thirty-five years old, and I'm not sure that I like to talk to him. The counselors and teachers work together and I'm beginning to see that every office talks to every other office! It will not be easy to cheat the system here.

D.P. #6 Withholding information often works to your disadvantage in the U.S...See p.23

My children are all in ESOL/HILT classes at their schools. Lam is the happiest so far, but children always adjust so quickly. Triet and Nga are working very hard at school. Almost all refugee children are placed in the HILT program. This means High Intensity Language Training. To begin, Triet, Lam and Nga will be in special classes all day for

limited-English speakers. As their language improves they will remain in the HILT program for special help with English, but will also attend regular classes with American students. The HILT teachers will continue to give special help with grammar, listening, reading, speaking, and vocabulary until they can function well in the regular English classroom.

My children say they don't understand much English yet. Their cousins have introduced them to some of their friends and Nga is already complaining that she needs more clothes. The girls here wear only tight jeans, and I don't like to see my daughter dressed like that.

They say there are several Amerasian students in their school. These kids (that's what they call them here) are having a very hard time. The Vietnamese students don't want to be with them, and the American students don't let them in their groups. I think it is because everyone is confused. They look American, but they can't speak English. I told Triet and Nga to stay away from them. Their mothers don't seem to be able to discipline them, and they already have a reputation in the school for not making good grades. Of course, most of them had very little education in Vietnam. Many of them have too many absences from school, and they seem to try to act American as soon as they arrive here. I wonder what will happen to them.

D.P. #7 Stereotyping is an over-simplified pattern of grouping people that is too general and can be hurtful...See p.23

One big thing I don't understand about the schools here is that they place the students with others of the same age, regardless of the amount of education they have had. This means that Triet is in the same classes with students who have gone to school for ten years but he has gone for only seven years. I hope he does not have problems because of this.

Already I can see that we are beginning to get on Thanh's nerves. With so many people in the house there is a lot of work. She goes to her job all day and then must come home in the evening to cook dinner for everyone. She wants Khoa to help more, which makes him mad. Dung goes to school every

morning and is too tired to help much. I would like to have our own place, but we can't afford it. Khoa says in America refugee families sacrifice for each other. I think we will soon look for an apartment.

Months Two and Three

Now I am understanding why both the husband and wife must work in America. It's expensive! Dung and I started to look for our own apartment and quickly learned that while there are many apartments in this area, there are very few that we can afford. Everyone tells us that housing is a very big problem here. The housing codes require that we must have separate bedrooms for boys and girls. Some places allow you to use the living room for sleeping, but for my family I am required to have at least a two-bedroom apartment. The least expensive place we can find is $450/month and we must pay all utilities. Heat will cost about $90/month; electricity is about $70/month. Some apartments also charge for water. If we want a telephone this costs about $40/month. We must save enough money to pay for the first month's rent and the security deposit.

D.P.#8 Housing codes regulate where you can live...See p.24

Since there are so many foreign-born people from all over the world living in this area, I will continue to look for an apartment where there are many nationalities living together. Khoa says this is preferable because we will all be learning to adjust to life in the U.S., and we will have fewer problems and more privacy than if we move into a totally Vietnamese area.

I have heard from other students at school that many people violate the housing codes. Sometimes they get in trouble and get evicted; sometimes the landlord charges $100 more for each extra person who is living in the apartment over the allowed number. Sometimes the landlord overlooks it if you always pay your rent on time, never complain or ask for anything, and make all repairs yourself. (Of course some people tell the landlord that they have a certain number of

D.P. #9 Another example of deceptive behavior... See p.24

family members living there and then they slip in a few extras that he doesn't know about! I think they must hide the "extras" with family or friends until it is all right to move them back with the rest of the family.) One Khmer man in my school has twenty-seven people living in his four-bedroom house. Another Vietnamese family of nine is living in a one-bedroom apartment. If they get caught they pretend that they didn't understand the rules. All families prefer to have their own apartments, but if they can't afford it they have to live with other family members or friends. I know three couples who live together in a two-bedroom apartment. They are away at work all day, then come home just to eat and sleep. They do this so they can save money.

The one thing that everyone tells me is that if you don't pay your rent you will be evicted. If you are evicted it is harder to rent another place because you have a poor credit reference. It is amazing to me how much information is available to people who work in various offices. I guess the wide use of computers in the United States makes it harder to get away with things.

D.P.#10
Establishing a good credit record is important...
See p.24

I am happy that almost anywhere we move in this area there are good schools for my children. Some are better than others, but they are all pretty good. Khoa tells me these are some of the best schools in the U.S. so I think for now we will not move from this area even if housing is expensive. In fact, most refugees who come to this area do not leave here even though welfare payments are much higher in some other parts of the United States. Here we have family and we like the area.

Even while I am worried about getting an apartment for my family we have been busy preparing and celebrating Tet. Dung and Thanh made special Vietnamese food and we went to the Tet celebration which was held at the community center. Everyone was dressed in native clothes and there was music and dancing and, of course, tables of the favorite foods with their familiar smells. All of our friends were there, and many

Americans also attended and joined in the festivities. (They even cancelled English classes at my school in celebration!) The Chinese New Year was at the same time as Tet and the small Chinatown in this area had a very large parade and celebration. Many people attended. It was a very happy time but I was homesick for my country.

A multicultural fair was also held at the community center around the time of Tet. All cultures, not just the Southeast Asian, participated; it was a good opportunity to learn about other cultures and for them to learn about us. I think we are lucky to have so many different nationalities in this area. We are not noticed so much and the Americans seem to enjoy the differences.

I also learned that there are many temples here and that the very first real Buddhist temple in the U.S. is located here. The Cambodians, Lao and Vietnamese all have temples, and many Christian churches share their buildings with us so our religious services are usually held on Sunday afternoons. Refugees come from many miles away for special religious occasions and to enjoy the traditions of the temples.

Month Four

My job counselor runs a Job Club which we are required to attend. It's held once a week and is supposed to be a place where we come to talk about problems or worries and to learn more about actual jobs around here. My counselor has a few different groups. For the lower level English students, he begins speaking to them in Vietnamese. In our group he uses only English since he says that's what we'll be using when we go to work. There are also other nationalities represented in our group and not everyone speaks Vietnamese.

The Job Club began with a workshop that was held for two hours on four consecutive days. We were all tested to find out our interests and aptitudes and we talked about our previous work experience in our own country. We defined our technical and personal skills and then learned something about the jobs that might be available to us here. We learned

about starting salaries and promotions and what an employer expects from his employees. In this country, there are many jobs where women are supervisors. Some of the men in the group wonder if they can work for a woman. We are raised to expect that our wives will run things at home, but we don't want to have to work for them!

The job counselor told us our *personal* skills are more important than our technical skills. He said it is very important for us to be pleasant, willing and eager to learn, reliable and punctual, and that most employers will teach technical skills, especially for entry-level jobs. He emphasized the importance of asking questions when we don't understand and said that Americans are very patient and will teach you many things, but you must ask for help or they will assume you know what to do.

D.P. #11
American employers are willing to train, but they're also demanding...
See p.24

Some people in the group asked about skills training. My counselor said it is not a good idea to take training until you have been here for about a year. He said you can't make a *wise* decision until you can make a *good* decision, and you can't make a *good* decision until you know more about this country, your own skills, and the job market here.

I have been to several job club meetings now and each one is a little different. Sometimes refugees who are working come to talk to us about their experiences. Sometimes employers come to tell us about their businesses and to answer questions. In one meeting we learned about on-the-job training (OJT) and that sounded interesting to me. In OJT your job counselor helps you find a job where you can use your old skills and add new ones, or you can learn a completely different job.

The good thing about OJT is that the U.S. government reimburses the employer for some of your salary. This encourages employers to provide work for refugees by paying some of the training costs. There aren't too many OJT positions available though.

Sometimes there is nothing special planned for our meetings and we just talk about what's happening to us. My

counselor is beginning to push me to look for a job and keeps asking me about my plan. I don't want to tell him what I'm thinking.

In fact, I don't like what I'm thinking at all. There are so many new things to get used to. Somehow, when I was in the camp I thought that life would be easy here. While we were there the teachers and all of the staff treated us in a special way, and there really were no worries except to wonder when we would be leaving. Here I am feeling pressure to learn English faster, get a job, get our own apartment, buy clothes for my children and help around the house. I'm homesick and I miss my country and the life that was familiar to me. We don't have enough money and I'm worried that if we don't have public assistance that we might not make it at all. My brother's children don't like to speak Vietnamese at home and I'm afraid that my children will begin to think the same way.

D.P.#12 Some depression is normal...See p.25

While I study English I keep wondering what I am preparing for. I keep remembering more of what I learned in the camp, but I don't seem to be progressing quickly enough. Everything moves so fast here. The cars are fast, the people are fast, everyone is expected to work and produce. I hoped that Khoa and Thanh would have more time just to relax and have fun with us, but they are always working and growing more unhappy all of the time that we are still in their house. I know a lot of other students at school, but none of them are really my friends. In fact, I was hoping that other Vietnamese refugees who have been here for a year or so would become our friends and help us to understand what's going on. Instead, they all seem so busy getting their own lives established that they don't have time for us. I feel very sad and ashamed when I meet other Vietnamese on the street and I want to talk to them, but they just ignore me. Maybe they are picking up some of the American ways about respecting privacy.

I am also frustrated with my wife because she is so shy. She depends on me and Khoa too much and she wants us to advise her about everything. I don't know what to do myself so I can't give very good advice to her! Khoa said that when they came to the U.S. that Thanh adjusted more quickly than

he did. She got a job before he did and started working as a housekeeper in a hotel. She even had a part-time job in the evenings working in the kitchen at a restaurant. She wanted Khoa to go to school longer and to learn more English and maybe get a skill, hoping that he could earn more money later on. They had their problems, though, because Thanh expected Khoa to help with the children and help around the house. He hated it! Thanh had to arrange child care for their two small children when Khoa wasn't there and the older children were in school. I guess they fought and argued a lot, but after Khoa got a job things were better. Thanh still complains that he doesn't help enough. Maybe Thanh can teach Dung about the way that Vietnamese women act in America. That might not be so good though. Dung might expect me to help with the chores around the house too!

Thanh said even though life is very hard here and she has to work much harder than in Vietnam, this is a better place for women. She makes her own money, has her own friends and has more freedom here to do many things. From what I can see among other refugees, women like it here best, then children, and last men.

In some ways I'm lucky. At least I have my family with me. The single men are very lonely. Many of them drink a lot and they seem to have even less direction than I do. They want girlfriends, but young Vietnamese women are hard to find and American women aren't interested in them. They have no money, no job, no family, no girlfriends!

In our Job Club there are some women who are widows and are here alone with their children. Some of them really want to work but are worried about how they can do everything that must be done. They must support their children and take care of them. They don't have enough money to buy a car so they have to spend a lot of time traveling by bus each day. If their children are young they must arrange for child care which costs money. If their children are older, especially teen-agers, they have to learn to adjust to their changes without a husband and father to help. Life is very hard for single mothers here.

A man in our group told me about the problems he had with the Social Services Department. His eleven-year-old son had been disrespectful and he slapped him across the face. The next day the mark was still on his face and his teacher called the Protective Service office of the Social Service Department to report that the child had been abused. The social worker came to his home and accused him of child abuse. He and his wife had to go to a group with other parents who are also refugees and the social worker explained to them how ordinary discipline in my country is considered abuse here. There is so much freedom in the United States. Children here are allowed to behave in ways that seem disrespectful. Children are not punished for things that they would be punished for in Vietnam. As a Vietnamese parent I am confused by the American laws and I don't know how to discipline my own children.

A Khmer man told us he and his wife had left their two- and four-year-old children alone in the car while they took care of different errands. The social worker told them that their children would be taken away from them if they ever left them alone again. She called it child neglect. The law here is that children under twelve years of age must have an adult look after them. When Dung and I get jobs we will have to arrange for Lam to be in child care or stay with a friend until he is old enough to stay alone.

Someone else told us about their neighbor who had the police come to the house and take the husband away. He had come home drunk and beat up his wife. This had happened before,but this time the wife told their sponsor who called the police. The husband explained that he was very frustrated and depressed and his wife didn't serve him as she should, as is the Vietnamese custom. The policeman told him this was called domestic violence and is not permitted in the U.S. He also warned him that if it happened again he could be arrested and even go to jail.

D.P.#13 There are laws regarding child and spouse abuse or neglect... See p.25

I must be very careful not to get too depressed. I heard from my brother that there are many refugees, especially

older people, who never leave their homes. Life here is very different and there is so much to adjust to. For the old people and for those who don't learn English, it is very hard to be happy. Maybe my job counselor is right when he keeps telling us to stay busy.

Right now the thing I think about the most is getting our own place. I did tell my counselor that this is a part of my plan.

Month Six

Now maybe things will be better. We found an apartment not too far from Khoa's house. It has only two bedrooms so Nga will have to have her bed in the living room. She doesn't like that!

By living with Khoa we had saved enough money from our welfare checks to pay the required deposit plus the first month's rent. There are several places where we can buy furniture at reasonable prices, and many of the churches in the area have special programs to assist refugees. Some of them have clothing; others have furniture or food. Our apartment is not very fancy but we are glad to be alone.

There are many other refugee families in our apartment complex. It is called low-income housing, so none of us who live here has much money. Besides Asians, there are a lot of blacks, Hispanics and some whites. The refugee families who have been here for awhile say they have had no particular problems getting along with the others. Most of the families don't want to stay here too long. When they get jobs they try to save their money so they can first buy a car and then get a better house. I have not seen it happen while we have lived here, but I am told that sometimes some of the blacks who live here resent it when they see the refugees start to work and save money and begin to acquire things.

Khoa and I have had several discussions about refugee resettlement in the U.S., and he thinks welfare for refugees

may be a big problem. In 1975, when refugees first started coming to the U.S., many Americans felt the refugees would have a very hard time supporting themselves since they knew no English and life here was so different from anything they had known in Southeast Asia. It was decided that refugees would be eligible to receive public support for a limited time while they learned English and gained some information about job opportunities here. As time passed, the system of welfare assistance to refugees became very complicated. Now, rules vary from state to state, and even people who work in the welfare system have different opinions about who should really receive welfare. I do not like it that we have to take welfare, but so many people in the camps--and even here--say you're crazy if you don't. My job counselor and the VOLAG keep trying to encourage us to take a job, and the job counselor keeps talking to us about making a plan so we can be self-supporting.

He says there is no such thing as free money. There are always strings attached. He says you aren't free when you have to report monthly to the welfare office; when you must attend school or job clubs; when you can't buy certain things; or when you're taking hand-outs. My counselor says we can't be equals in this country when we ask for special treatment because we are refugees. It is not possible to be provided for because we can't support ourselves and be equal at the same time.

As much as I don't want to accept it, I think he's right when he says that historically most first-generation immigrants and refugees to America rarely achieve everything they would like to. If we come as adults, we will always have an accent no matter how well we learn English. We came for our children's sake. They are our hope.

It would be much easier if everyone who is trying to help us--the VOLAG, sponsor, public assistance worker, job counselor, MAA, family and friends--give the same advice! It is confusing because I hear different points of view from people and organizations who are supposed to be helping

refugees. I am trying to figure out what is really helpful for me in the long run.

One of the refugees who came to the Job Club to talk to us has been in this country for two years, and he told us of his experiences. He was very proud and did not want to take welfare so he first took a part-time job earning $3.35/hour working in the kitchen at the Big Boy restaurant. He then found a job working as a janitor for a church for $5.00/hour and continued to work both jobs for five months when he got very sick with internal hemorrhaging. (He had been in prison in Vietnam for five years before he escaped and had developed many physical problems there.) Of course, he had to go to the hospital where he stayed for one month. His medical bills totalled $15,000, and he had no insurance. Although he hated to do it, he went to the social worker and explained his situation and asked for help with his medical bills. He learned that even though he had not applied for public assistance when he arrived in the U.S., he was still eligible for Medicaid because his level of income was low, so his medical expenses were paid for him. I have been worried that if we did not take welfare that we would not get Medicaid if one of us got sick. This is not so. If you go to work you can still receive all of the special assistance available to refugees if you qualify. Since I have learned this, I am not so afraid that I can't support my family if I do not take public assistance.

Besides, my job counselor told us that President Reagan wants to have everyone who receives welfare go to work if they are healthy and not old. This program includes Americans, and the program is called Workfare. It will go into effect in many states, including California. Many Americans believe you are not helping people when you *give* them money that they haven't earned. I asked whether you can earn money and not report it to the welfare office. That way I would be less afraid to go to work, we'd have more money to live on, and maybe even save some. My counselor said in America you can *do* anything, but if you get caught breaking the law you pay a price! The price you pay depends on what you do. You might have to repay what you have taken; you

might be fined or fired; you might even go to jail!

My job counselor thinks it would be a good idea if public assistance could be set up as a loan that we would repay after we go to work. That way we could show our appreciation for the help we are receiving, gain some confidence while we learn the language and the culture, and also demonstrate that we intend to be good citizens who contribute to this society. It would help create a positive image of and for the refugee community.

In one of our Job Club meetings we talked about getting into trouble with the law. A single man in my group had his driver's license suspended for six months because he was driving while drunk. Others said they know several people who had been arrested for driving while intoxicated (DWI). It is rumored that there is a lot of crime in this area, but I think it is exaggerated. A few refugees have been mugged when they went to the store to cash their checks, but if you go to the bank, even mugging isn't a problem.

Months Seven and Eight

I finally decided that maybe my job counselor could help me, and I went to talk to him about my plan. Originally my idea was to study English, get skill training, and not to work for one year. Then I became less sure about that. It is hard for me to trust people so I was careful in what I said to him. I am beginning to see that in this country you can choose many things. People don't *tell* you what to do. You have to decide for yourself. These are some things that I considered when we talked about my plan.

I am thirty-nine years old and in good health. I should be able to do many jobs. My English is okay, not great, but okay. I can read English and I understand it better than I speak it. I have a high school education and I am a hard worker. In my country I had a small business but I don't know what I can do here. I have a wife and three children so I must earn enough to support them.

When I considered my options, I decided that I would probably have to take a job that paid between $4.00 and $4.50 an hour. I would start out at that wage *even if I waited for* eighteen months before I went to work. If I earned less than what I am getting from public assistance, I could still get a supplemental welfare check so I would not have less money to live on. I am eligible for Medicaid and for other services if I need them for eighteen months. I wanted training to develop a skill but only about 6% of refugees receive skill training and it is very hard to be accepted for it. My counselor said that training may give me an edge on *getting* a job but I would still have to start at the bottom like everyone else. I wanted a job where I could stay for three or four years,but that may not be possible. I also wanted a job with good benefits and then the salary will not be so important. (Besides,I will see that Dung gets a job also,so we will become a two-income family!)

D.P.#14
Two-income families are more likely to be self-sufficient...
See p.25

A very important thing I learned in the Job Club was the job search technique. Maybe someone can help me find my first job,but after that I must find the next one. I am learning how to develop my own opportunities.

The counselor helped me prepare an application, although I didn't need it when I went to my interview for the job where I was finally hired. The counselor introduced me to a shop that makes windows and doors. I took the job making $4.75/hour. There are some benefits. There are also other refugees working there,and the American supervisor is happy with our work.

I feel very lucky to get this job because there is very little industry in this area. Most refugees have to take jobs in the hospitality business either in hotels or restaurants. The problem with those jobs is that when business is slow you don't get to work if they don't need you.

My boss keeps telling us many of the same things that the job counselor emphasized in the Job Club--be punctual, be reliable, be willing to learn, get along with your co-workers, and ask questions if you don't understand! He says by doing

these things we make a good impression and make it easier, not only for ourselves, but for other refugees later on. He also asked us to give two weeks' notice if we quit this job to accept another one.

It took me seven weeks to find this job once I became serious about going to work. I now realize that no one can help if you really don't want to go to work.

Months Nine thru Twelve

I am very happy with my job. I got a raise after three months and am now earning $5.00/hour.

Although she is still frightened, Dung is convinced that she must work also, and she is looking for a position that won't require much English. She may get a job as a housekeeper in a hotel.

A big problem now is my children, especially Nga. She wants to date the American boys,and,of course I don't approve. I don't know what to do about it and I often wish my children had been younger when we came here. I think it would have been easier to adjust to their changes.

All of my children are doing well in school and Lam is now in the regular English classroom. Although I am very tired, I go to school three nights a week. Before I went to work and I was still studying English everday, my head felt like I couldn't learn another thing. My tongue was too thick and I just couldn't seem to say the words correctly. Now it's easier to learn English because I hear it and speak it at work every day.

We are also getting along better with Khoa and Thanh since we have our own apartment. I think that what I heard about the problem refugees have with blacks is not true. There are some problems, but there are also problems with whites and other refugees. Basically we all mind our own business and don't bother each other.

When I first came here I was afraid of Americans and didn't trust them. I have learned that they are not from another planet and that they have the same feelings that I have. They really seem to like us, and if they don't, they just ignore us and don't make any trouble. My job counselor used to tell us everyone has problems--Americans too--but America is a great place to be. Everyone calls this the *Land of Opportunity*. At first I didn't believe this, but I MUST believe it or I will do nothing and go nowhere. I am trying to take risks and do things that aren't comfortable to me. I even went to a picnic at my boss's house. He says I'm expanding my social network!

D.P.#15 Limiting contact with non-refugee groups does not help in integration... See p.26

I have started to dream. I want to make a good impression wherever I go, which will be good for me and good for my fellow countrymen. I want to own a home. I know some refugees who were able to afford one after they had been here for about five or six years. Homes are expensive--at least $90,000--but some areas even offer low-interest loans for low-income families. There are several banks that understand the Asian ways, and they allow us to borrow money because they know we live frugally and always pay back loans. There are also many Asian real estate brokers and they understand what we might want and what we can afford.

I dream about having my own business again and feeling the pride and pleasure of being the boss! I miss my country, but I am here and I want to become involved in things that will show my gratitude. If I only have a job and feel that life is a struggle, then my life will be fruitless. My job counselor pointed out that Americans volunteer to do many things. Right now I feel like I don't have much time to give away, but I want to contribute in some way. Maybe later I will.

Triet got a job after school and in the summer, and he thinks that one day he may want to go to college. He can go to high school until he is twenty if he needs to, so he has some time.

I dream, but I am also afraid. I am afraid that one day the refugee children and maybe my grandchildren won't be able to speak and write their own language. I see my children who

have become Americanized so quickly, and I worry that they will lose interest in their own culture and heritage. I worry that I may lose control of my own children. I don't do so well with them when they do things I wish they wouldn't do, but I don't know how to stop them. There is a Vietnamese school that is offered every summer where the children learn the traditions, heritage, and language of their native country. I will see that my children attend, and maybe this will help them better understand who they are--and maybe they will understand me a little better too!

I wonder what would happen to us if I lost my job and we were no longer eligible for public assistance. I wonder if I would have to start at the bottom again and if I could make it. It really scares me to think about not having a safety net.

But I am glad I came here. I CHOSE to come to America--not France or Australia or any other country--for many reasons, not only for free money but for opportunity, freedom, and my children's future. I came to this area because my brother was here, but even if he wasn't here I would be glad I did. There is a certain stability here because many refugees have been here since 1975 and they know the *real* system and can help us understand it. Our traditions are established here, and though I wish there were more monks, the temples mean a lot to me. We have to stick together and support each other while at the same time be good ambassadors in this society.

No matter where we would have resettled, we would have had problems. This is a good place to be.

DISCUSSION POINTS

DP#1

As justification for not accepting employment, refugees sometimes use the excuse that their TB tests show a positive reaction. If a person has had a BCG innoculation within the past 7 years, they frequently show a positive reaction on a TB test, but this is nothing to worry about. It is **rare** that a refugee is unable to work because of active TB; however, if this occurs, it usually lasts for only a few weeks until it is under control.

DP #2

Many school systems in areas that have large numbers of foreign born students have intake offices with a bilingual staff and special services for these students. Frequently, there is additional emphasis throughout the school system for foreign born students, such as cross-cultural training for teachers, cultural fairs, and parent-student outreach services.

DP #3

Although there is a movement toward the standardization of stateside ESL levels so they correspond with the levels in the overseas program, some stateside programs do not use the same levels. Refugees who are not aware of this difference for placement in a stateside ESL program may misunderstand their class assignment in the U.S.

DP #4

D Level English students would need to improve their English substantially to be able to successfully participate in a college program. Most colleges require limited English speakers to pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOFEL) before they are admitted into a degree program.

DP #5

Since almost all refugees begin in entry level jobs in the U.S., Dung will not necessarily be at a disadvantage in finding employment. Her fears about employment may be greater because she has had no previous work history, but in some cases inexperienced refugees are easier to place and

feel more job satisfaction than refugees with higher--often unrealistic--expectations. Training for this group should include information about the kinds of entry level jobs held by refugees and the development of skills for seeking, getting, and keeping a job.

DP #6

For most adult refugees, withholding information is a highly developed pattern which has been necessary to their survival in their native countries and possibly in the camps. Service providers in the U.S. emphasize the importance of openness and honesty in order that they may provide the best possible resettlement assistance and advice. Experienced stateside staff are aware of the "withholding style" of many incoming refugees and can become frustrated in their efforts to work with them. The disadvantage for refugees who continue their deceptive practices in the U.S. is that they limit the amount of useful information they could receive and build a barrier between themselves and those who really want to help them.

DP #7

Vietnamese sometimes stereotype Amerasian children in negative terms. It is important to point out that the attitudes described in the story--while common among refugees--are **stereotypes** and do not accurately describe many Amerasian students. Many of them are equally well-behaved and are doing as well academically as any other refugee student.

Stereotypes also exist in the U.S. about refugees in general. Some of the negative mental pictures that are held by some Americans are that refugees: 1) receive a disproportionate amount of government aid; 2) take jobs away from Americans who need them; 3) don't take care of their property, particularly their houses; 4) are sneaky and can't be trusted. Such stereotypes obviously are inaccurate for most refugees. Perhaps discussion of inaccurate judgements made against Indochinese refugees as a whole may help them look more critically at stereotypes which they may have about Amerasian children and youth.

DP #8

Housing codes are in effect in most cities in the U.S. They vary by state, county and city. Housing codes are rules of the local government that apply to both tenants and landlords. They regulate such things as the number of persons allowed to live in a given amount of space, ratio of bedrooms to people, unrelated persons living together, and various health-related housing standards.

DP #9

Withholding information about the actual family size is another example of deception common among refugees. Overcrowding in living situations in the U.S. is a frequent problem that many landlords and local government officials have chosen to ignore. Refugees coming to the U.S. should be aware that American landlords are "onto the game"--the misleading information does not go unrecognized.

DP #I0

Establishing a good credit record is important in the U.S. Many people buy major appliances, cars and other large purchases "on time". By doing this you can spread payments over a longer period, thus making it possible to purchase some items you otherwise may not be able to afford. Almost everyone buys a house "on time". This is called a mortgage. Virtually all credit transactions are kept on computers, and this information is available to people or businesses that are willing to extend credit. A poor credit record can make not only housing, but many other things, very hard to get.

DP #II

Most American employers will be patient with new employees for a reasonable period of training. It is their expectation that refugee employees will ask questions if they don't understand, will learn quickly, and will perform at a high level on the job. It is probably accurate to say that American employers are both patient **and** demanding.

DP #12

Almost all refugees coming to the U.S. experience depression during their first few years there. According to the Indochinese Health and Adaptation Research Project (IHARP), the largest number of refugees experience the most severe depression during their second year in the U.S. There are many resources that address this subject, including a summary of the IHARP study in *Information Update,* Issue 7.

DP #13

The many frustrations, disappointments, and challenges that all refugees experience during their resettlement are sometimes expressed in violent behavior towards members of their families. Social workers frequently report about cases of child or spouse abuse committed by Indochinese refugees. Certain forms of punishment, such as beating, that are permitted in Southeast Asia are illegal and punishable by law in the U.S. Another common problem that is reported is refugees leaving their children unattended. This may be considered child neglect. Many parents *assume* that their children will be watched by a friend or neighbor who is at home. In the U.S. children must be supervised by an adult at all times. Parents who leave their children unattended may be charged with child abuse and taken to court.

DP #14

There have been several studies that report on the economic progression of refugees in the U.S. The IHARP study, completed in 1985, reported that the single most important factor to the improvement of economic status for refugees is when both husband and wife are employed. There is a significant difference between the income level of families where only one person is employed (even when that person has two jobs,) and two-income families. Among Americans, the majority of women work outside of the home. If refugees are to reach a reasonable level of self-sufficiency, it is likely that both the husband and wife would need to be employed.

DP #15

When they come to the U.S., many refugees have a tendency to limit social contacts to people in their ethnic communities. The expansion of one's social network to include the American community is important for a number of reasons. Some reasons include being able to experience American culture, learn social customs, integrate into their new community, and meet people who can possibly help them with employment and other needs. Most Americans enjoy meeting people from other cultures, but they often feel uncomfortable about initiating this contact for fear that the refugee might find it offensive.